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Fitting the Extension Program to the Needs of the Adjustment Program

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FITTING THE EXTENSION PROGRAM TO THE NEEDS
OF THE ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM (1)By
C. W. Warburton

At a time like this when we are in the midst of a readjustment, not only of our agriculture but of our whole social structure, it is desirable to sit down for a quiet appraisal of the things we have been doing and the new things that are presented to us, to determine what parts of our program should be retained, what parts we can, at least for the present, defer, and what parts we may perhaps entirely abandon. The difficulty is to find opportunity for such a quiet careful review. I confess that I have not found that opportunity to the extent that I desired. At the time when I planned to try to order my thoughts on the subject which I have been asked to discuss, a new and somewhat unexpected development in the adjustment program, the holding of a series of regional meetings with extension directors to discuss the corn-hog program, was suddenly injected into the picture. Because of inability to give my subject the careful thought it deserves, all I can do is to outline some of the major considerations with the hope that following Dean Mumford's paper there will be general discussion of this topic which is so important to all of us.

Extension work and extension programs are never static. Extension activities have been gradually adjusted to changing conditions. The war-time urge for increased production of foodstuffs gave way to the more orderly post-war period when the major attention was given, not to bringing new acres into cultivation, but to the more efficient use of existing acres, consideration of the land-utilization problem, the organization of cooperative marketing and purchasing associations, the development of market grades and standards, farm-management studies and other activities having to do with the business side of agriculture. Now, again the emphasis shifts, the pendulum is at the opposite end of the swing with the stress on taking acres out of cultivation, control of production, leaving land idle or putting it into grass, with the thought that the farmer will get larger returns for fewer bushels of wheat or corn, fewer bales of cotton, fewer pounds of hogs

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cattle, or lambs, and perhaps most important of all, fewer hours of labor, leaving him more leisure for himself and his family. For the first time, however, those who make the reductions have opportunity to profit therefrom rather than, as has been the case in too many previous acreage reduction efforts, for the major profit to go to those who, with thought only of individual gain rather than the common good, plant extra acres when their neighbors reduce.

With a reduction of the acreage in cultivation and the number of livestock on farms there is increasing need for efficiency of production. The greatest reward will come to those who produce at the lowest cost per commodity unit and not necessarily to those who obtain the largest yields of wheat or cotton or pork per acre. We cannot hope for conditions which will make agriculture profitable for every person who engages in it. There will still continue to be wide differences in the efficiency of individuals but the greatest reward will continue to be given to those whose operations are best planned, who conduct their business with the greatest care, who plan their operations well in advance, keep records of cost and income, and adjust their farming to suit the needs of the times. Agricultural adjustment can not be expected suddenly to make rural life Utopian any more than present-day control of business can be expected to insure success for every one who engages in it.

In the campaigns in which the great majority of extension workers have been engaged in recent months to sign up cotton and wheat farmers in production-control agreements, the campaigns which are projected for the next few months for the signing of similar agreements for tobacco, corn, and hogs, and the 1934 cotton crop, naturally much which was planned in the way of extension activities has had to be set aside, or carried on less actively than was anticipated. It is not to be expected that county production-control associations, once organized, will go along on the even tenor of their way with no further attention from extension workers. We must expect that problems will continually arise with one or another of these organizations which will require the agent's attention even though he is not burdened with the actual business of the association as its secretary. It is highly desirable, however, to continue the educational program of the county agent, modifying it and moulding it to fit into the new order. Production control is only applied economics, limiting the production of any commodity to the quantity which the market will take at a price which yields a fair return to the producer and which is not unduly burdensome to the consumer. We still need to keep constantly before rural people the latest results of research, the latest productions of plant and animal breeders, the latest methods of plant and animal disease control, and all similar information that contributes to efficient, economical production.

Production-control campaigns which involve taking average acres out of cultivation on every farm can only be regarded in the light of temporary makeshifts. The Extension Service can make a large contribution to American agriculture by directing public thought to the removal from production of submarginal lands, leaving it idle or utilizing it for pasture, forests, or other useful purposes, and the better utilization and conservation of the more productive land. Beginnings have been made in some localities in the transfer of farmers from poor farms on which they had no reason-

able chance to make a living, to good farms on which they have, at least, an even break. I hope that eventually our production-control plans will lead to the removal from cultivation of submarginal areas and also to adjustments on individual farms which will result in better use of the good acres and the abandonment of effort to eke out a living from the poor ones. Production control with reduction in the acres planted to cotton, corn, wheat, and other crops presents new questions to extension workers as to the best use to be made of the contracted acres; use which will not bring new problems of surpluses in other commodities. In some areas, particularly in the South, production control will need to be guided to make sure not only that it does not result in problems involving the use of surplus acres but also that it does not throw out of employment thousands of farm tenant families. Southern agriculture in particular needs the most careful thought of both extension and research workers to devise methods of land utilization which will convince landowners that their best interests in the long run require liberal treatment of tenants and wage earners during this adjustment period. In this connection it is desirable to remember that unlike the probable need for long-continued curtailment of production of wheat, corn, and hogs because of a well-nigh vanished export market, the need for drastic reduction of cotton production probably will not extend beyond the period necessary for disposition of our present burdensome surplus. The tenants and wage earners who during the next year or two of drastic reduction of cotton acreage may appear to be unnecessary to produce 25 million acres of this commodity, will be needed a little later when we return, as now seems entirely probable, to a more normal production plan. If the cotton acreage on each plantation is divided pro rata among the tenants and each is given the use, either free or at a nominal rental, of some of the contracted acres for the production of food for the family and feed for the farm livestock, the "live-at-home" program so long advocated for the South will become a reality.

The machine age has resulted in the displacement of many workers in both industry and agriculture. Many people believe that we will have a very considerable problem in technical unemployment even in the most prosperous times. There is now a marked drift toward subsistence farming and location of families on small tracts of land from which they can produce, at least, a part of their food supply, supplementing this production with part-time employment. The Congress has recognized this movement by providing a fund of 25 million dollars to aid in the establishment of subsistence homesteads and decentralization of industry. Extension workers can be very useful in helping to see that this movement is properly guided, that those who are located on subsistence homesteads have an interest in and some training for rural life, that they are located on good land and not made the victims of exploiters, and that they are given guidance in their farm and home operations. There is need also for careful planning and placement of these subsistence homestead operations to make certain that they do not further complicate our farm problems by swelling the already burdensome surpluses or nullify in some degree the efforts which are now being made to control production. Here is new opportunity for extension workers in both agriculture and home economics.

While the county agricultural agents have been busy with crop-reduction plans, home demonstration agents have been equally busy conducting unusual and emergency activities. If there was nothing else in the history

of home demonstration work to justify its existence and public support, the service which home demonstration workers have rendered to the unemployed and the destitute would have provided that justification. One of the most striking and appealing chapters in the history of extension work to date is the record of the contributions of home demonstration agents in lightening the burden and brightening the lives, not only of those who are actually on relief rolls, but in rendering assistance to thousands of others to enable them to provide for themselves and avoid the necessity of applying for charity. Here to an even greater degree than in the agricultural field the ability of the home demonstration agent to extend her activities has been greatly increased through the devoted and intelligent service of thousands of unpaid local leaders. I feel that I can not pay too high tribute, not only to the members of our home demonstration staffs, but to the thousands of local leaders who have given so unstintedly of their time and of themselves.

In the home demonstration work more stress is being placed on the family budget, the best use of foods which are available to the family, the selection and proper preparation of cheap but adequate food supplies, and the development of new sources of income; and less time is being devoted to other things which in these times of stress may be considered as nonessentials. Everywhere, however, during the past two or three years there has been a growing demand on the part of rural people generally, both men and women, for inexpensive recreation and for reading courses, the organization and training of groups to present plays, and the like. If the new social order means more leisure, more time for rural people to do as they please, I can foresee that these demands for help along cultural and recreational lines will greatly expand. So far we have depended largely on cooperating agencies like the American Recreation Association for help in this field. Plans are now under discussion for somewhat similar cooperation with the American Federation of Art.

There is one phase of extension work which must be maintained at all costs. No matter what the demands on county agricultural agents may be for agricultural adjustment, no matter what the demands on home demonstration agents for relief activities, we can not and must not neglect 4-H club work. I am happy to say that such information as has come to us from the States through reports of extension workers and observation of our people from Washington shows that the 4-H clubs are being maintained both in membership and in quality of work done. There is opportunity for review of 4-H club projects to determine whether they are planned to meet the changing conditions through which we are now passing, and particularly whether they are planned to meet the conditions, so far as we can anticipate them, which will confront 4-H boys and girls a few years from now when they become farmers and home makers in their own right. Here again, projects concerned mainly with quantity of production should be revised to put the major emphasis on cost, quality, and efficiency. Particularly do I think we should give attention to the prizes which are offered for club work, with honors going not to those who produce the most bushels of corn or the most pounds of cotton to the acre, but to those who produce at the lowest cost per unit of product.

Though it may be somewhat foreign to this discussion, I want again to express my regret that occasionally prizes or returns to club members are out of all proportion to the accomplishment of the boy or girl. When the sweepstakes calf at a livestock show sells for \$10,000 merely because two or more commercial concerns get to bidding against each other for the advertising they may get out of it, while dozens of other calves almost as good hardly bring the current market price, too much emphasis is being placed on the winning of a championship and not enough recognition is being given to the rank and file who have done their level best. It is pleasing to note that in this depression many very successful club shows and exhibits have been held at which no prizes were offered other than the ribbon denoting first, second, or third place. At these shows there was no noticeable diminution in the quality of exhibits or the keenness of the competition, and I am sure there was far less heartburning and jealousy on the part of those who were not quite good enough to win top honors.

The experience of the last few months and the very remarkable accomplishments of the extension forces, aided by thousands of volunteer committeemen, in obtaining the signatures of more than a million farmers to contracts to destroy a part of their 1933 cotton crop, and in getting several hundred thousand wheat growers to reduce their production for 1934 and 1935, demonstrate the value of a well-trained, efficient county agricultural agent in every important agricultural county. In the cotton campaign, which was organized and completed within less than a month, it was necessary not only to present the program to well over a million farmers, but in many counties to appoint, install, and instruct an emergency county agent, sometimes unacquainted with the local people and local conditions. These emergency agents, with the cheerful cooperation of leading farmers and business men and the efficient supervision of directors and district agents, did surprisingly well and deserve all honor for their accomplishments. It is a marvel to me that there were so few failures. The general report of the cotton and wheat campaigns, however, is that the campaigns progressed more rapidly, more smoothly, and in general resulted in greater accomplishment in those counties where a well-trained, efficient agent was already on the job. I do not believe that any one factor is more important in the readjustment of American agriculture than the employment of a good county agricultural agent in every important agricultural county or in a district comprising two or more of the less important counties. I wish that we might hope to see provision made in the near future for an adequate force of well-trained agents publicly financed on a permanent basis. While the immediate requirements of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration make the completion of our staff of county agricultural agents the most imperative need of the hour, I feel just as strongly the need for making available the services of qualified home demonstration agents to rural women and girls in all counties as rapidly as that service can be financed.

With the new demands on extension agents to organize and conduct educational campaigns leading to the signing of contracts for production control, there must be a larger dependence on local leaders and demonstrators to make the educational program available to the public. In the setting up of the county wheat production control associations, thousands of farmers

have for the first time not only joined with their Government in a cooperative enterprise, but with their neighbors. Out of these county wheat production control associations already organized or in process of organization and the other commodity control associations which are projected, I can foresee possibilities of unified effort on the part of farmers such as we have never known before. Though the activities of these county production control associations are very properly limited to the entering into and carrying out of agreements to control the production of a specific commodity, cooperative effort growing out of them may extend far into other lines.

With the very great advances made in recent months in bringing together commercial interests on the one hand and labor groups on the other, there is greater need than ever before for strong, progressive farm organizations with well-trained, thoughtful leadership. If agriculture is to recover its rightful place in our national picture and to maintain it, there must be unified presentation of the needs of agriculture in State and Nation such as can be made only by organized agriculture representing, not as it does now, a minor fraction of the farm population, but in position to speak with authority for the great mass of rural people. It is not to be expected that all farmers or even a majority of them will join any one farm organization any more than that all will agree to the tenets of one political party or one religious denomination. Extension agents should lose no opportunity to work with all farm organizations in their counties and should impress on their constituents the desirability of membership in these organizations. It is regrettable that too often farm organizations expend their energies in competition with each other and that some farm leaders apparently are more concerned with power and publicity than in service to the rural people of the Nation.

Summing up my discussion in a few words, it seems to me this is a desirable time for a careful review of State and county extension programs; a consideration of those features which contribute directly to better farm income or better living conditions in rural homes, and elimination or postponement of those which for the moment, at least, do not make a definite contribution to this end. With the present necessity for economies in county, State, and Federal governmental operations, we must be able to show that every dollar made available to us is expended for a practical purpose, is expended in a way that brings the largest return to the rural people of this Nation. We need capable, well-trained extension agents in every rural county, financed with public funds, aided and supported by strong farm organizations, and supplemented with earnest, interested men and women who will assume community leadership of both adult and junior groups. There is need also, perhaps as never before, for able, tactful administration and supervision and for adequate specialist service. It is my belief that, though these are times that try men's souls, the Extension Service, taking the country as a whole, is in better repute than ever before, and I confidently expect to see it go on to larger things.

